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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000082

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SUBJECT: EGYPT CHANGES COURSE ON DEPORTING SUDANESE ASYLUM
SEEKERS, ALLOWS UNHCR DIRECT ACCESS TO DETAINEES

REF: CAIRO 58

Classified by the Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Jones for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Following a series of high-level Embassy demarches, the GOE informed post late January 4 that Egypt will permit the UNHCR access to the 631 Sudanese detainees it plans to deport. Egypt will delay the deportations until January 8 to allow UNHCR staff to interview the detainees. UNHCR Cairo deployed interview teams to three detention centers early on January 5. The GOE reversed course after the Ambassador's January 4 meeting with First Lady Suzanne Mubarak and the DCM's meeting the same day with Deputy Interior Minister General Hassen Abdel Rahman. With Mrs. Mubarak, the Ambassador urged GOE transparency on the Sudanese issue and close coordination with, and access for, the UNHCR prior to any deportations. The First lady revealed distress and sympathy on the issue, recognizing the damage to Egypt's international image. She committed to sharing the Ambassador's message within the GOE and to continuing her organization's charity work.

2. (C) During a January 4 meeting, the DCM urged Deputy Interior Minister General Hassen Abdel Rahman to work with UNHCR to address the aftermath of the December 30 tragedy, and to allow UNHCR prompt access to the detainees. Rahman revealed that Egypt would deport 631 of the 2,173 protesters it had removed from a Cairo park on December 30. The remaining detainees, he asserted, had been released since they had valid claims to remain in Egypt. Rahman said that the Sudan Embassy was cooperating closely to facilitate the deportations. Pressed on UNHCR access to detainees and coordination prior to deportations, Rahman revealed deep GOE anger and distrust of UNHCR. End summary.

First Lady Offers Sympathies

3. (C) With the Ambassador January 4, the First Lady expressed shock and regret over the deaths of Sudanese asylum seekers killed December 30 in an effort to end their 3-month protest. After reviewing charity work with the Sudanese, Mubarak lamented the damage the incident caused to Egypt's image. The Ambassador strongly encouraged Egypt to coordinate with the UNHCR and provide access to those Sudanese still detained. Such transparency would help establish the bona fides of those still detained and would reduce further damage to Egypt's image abroad. Egyptian police behavior, the Ambassador said, toward the Sudanese as well as toward Kefaya Movement protesters earlier in the year, revealed a tremendous need for Egyptian police training and professionalization. This may be one area where the U.S. can offer assistance. The First Lady endorsed the Ambassador's suggestion, and offered to share USG views on the Sudan issue within the GOE.

MOI Provides Latest Facts

4. (C) General Hassen Abdel Rahman, First Assistant to the Minister of Interior for State Security, offered the DCM January 4 an overview of GOE thinking on Sudanese asylum seekers. He said the GOE had detained 2,173 Sudanese on December 30, released already 1,542, and still detained 631. Those released, he said, held UNHCR blue or yellow ID cards, were legal residents in Egypt, or had valid visas. They also included family members of those with legal status. Those still in detention were in Egypt illegally and would be returned. They were in Egypt only to seek a better life in Europe or America, and had broken Egyptian law. The civil war in Sudan ended some time ago, yet these people are claiming to be refugees. According to Abdel Rahman, the

Sudan Embassy was cooperating fully to prepare necessary legal paperwork for the group to be returned to Sudan. The Sudan Embassy provided the GOE with assurances that the group would receive "humane treatment," he noted.

15. (C) Late in the day January 4, the DCM was told by senior MOI staff that Egypt had decided to reverse its decision to refuse UNHCR access and coordination regarding the 631 Sudanese to be deported. Egypt would delay its deportation schedule by three days (until January 8) to allow UNHCR to interview the detainees and review their cases. Early January 5, UNHCR senior staff confirmed the policy shift, and revealed that they would work "around the clock" to review the cases prior to any deportations. Details on the conditions of the UNHCR access remain unclear.

GOE: Deep Distrust of UNHCR

16. (C) In his afternoon conversation with the DCM, Abdel Rahman outlined the GOE's frustration with the local UNHCR staff, which it believed had failed to do its part to end the sit-in. He said he feared that if UNHCR gained access to the deportees, they would fabricate files to allow them to stay.

UNHCR in Action

17. (SBU) UNHCR Cairo representatives told post January 5 that they had deployed eight-member teams to three detention centers earlier the same day to begin interviewing detainees. As of mid-day January 5, the UNHCR conveyed to Embassy officers that they had experienced no difficulties setting up operations at the detention facilities. With only 72 hours to complete their task, UNHCR expects staff reinforcements from Geneva to assist in carrying out this task. On January 4, Embassy officers shared the GOE's concerns of UNHCR's bona fides with UNHCR staff and highlighted the importance of a thorough and transparent review of the deportees.

RICCIARDONE